



Department of Justice

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MISSOURI WHITE SUPREMACIST PLEADS GUILTY TO RACIALLY MOTIVATED ASSAULT

WASHINGTON, D.C.- The Department of Justice today announced that a Missouri man, who was an avowed white supremacist, pleaded guilty to participating in a June 2001 racially motivated assault at a Springfield, Missouri restaurant.

The defendant, Steven A. Heldenbrand, pleaded guilty to a federal civil rights conspiracy charge for his role in attacking two African-American men at a Denny's restaurant in Springfield, Missouri in June of 2001. Heldenbrand, who was charged with the assault in the United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri in February 2004, admitted that he and four of his associates beat, kicked and stabbed one of the victims, Maurice Wilson.

"Those who commit violence based on the color of another's skin do violence to the fundamental values of our nation," said Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, R. Alexander Acosta. "Today's plea is a reminder that the Department of Justice remains strongly committed to aggressively prosecuting bias-motivated crimes."

According to his plea, also filed with the District Court, the defendant admitted participating in the attack on account of the victims' race and because they were using the Denny's restaurant. Two co-defendants in the attack were charged in February of 2004 with violating the civil rights of the victim and are awaiting trial.

Heldenbrand also agreed to plead guilty to a related state charge brought by Greene County Prosecuting Attorney Darrell Moore. The defendant's federal guilty plea carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000.

"This is another step toward bringing to justice those who violated the civil rights of others because of their race," said Todd P. Graves, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Missouri. "Those who commit bias-motivated crimes will be held accountable for their actions."

The Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Springfield Police Department jointly investigated the matter. The Criminal Section of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division and the United States Attorney's Office jointly prosecuted the case.

Prosecuting the perpetrators of bias-motivated crimes remains a top priority of the Justice Department. Since 2001, the Civil Rights Division has charged 110 defendants in 69 cases of bias-motivated crime.

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